

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mr Jeremy Smith  
Headteacher  
St Michael's Church of England Aided Infant School  
School Lane  
Mickleham  
Dorking  
Surrey  
RH5 6EW

Dear Mr Smith

### **Short inspection of St Michael's Church of England Aided Infant School**

Following my visit to the school on 30 November 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in January 2012.

#### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since your appointment in September 2014 you have brought a calm and positive style of leadership to the school. You have rightly earned the confidence and respect of your staff, governors and parent community. Your work is highly valued by them all.

Staff value the positive relationships you have created in the school community and the opportunities you have given them to develop their skills. Governors told me they admire your professionalism, resilience and dedication. One of the many parents who wrote enthusiastically about your leadership said the school is run in a 'kind, caring and compassionate way'.

Your work has not been made easy. You have dealt sensitively with significant and complex challenges around staffing in the last two years. When making difficult decisions, you have always had the best interests of the pupils in mind. This included increasing your own teaching commitment when it was necessary. Staffing is now more stable.

Given the background of change and challenge, on the whole you have done well to maintain the high standards the school has prided itself on at the end of Year 2.

At the time of the previous inspection, school leaders were asked to improve aspects of teaching and to provide more opportunities for pupils to write at length. Evidence seen both in lessons I visited and in pupils' workbooks show that teaching is good overall. Pupils now have the opportunity to write at length at least once a fortnight in their English work. However, we agreed that pupils' skills at writing at length in other subjects are underdeveloped.

You are fortunate to have a skilled and well-trained governing body that gets the balance between support and challenge just right. Knowing the community well, the governors are mindful of the school having a successful future as well as flourishing now. They have the admirable aim of making St Michael's 'the best little school it can be'.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Every single parent who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, at the time of my visit said they would recommend the school. Many commented enthusiastically about the nurturing and caring ethos and environment you provide. St Michael's is certainly a school of choice rather than catchment. Very few pupils live in or come from the immediate locality. As one parent wrote, 'The school is a hidden gem and more people need to know about it!'

You rightly acknowledge and celebrate the work of the parent community and Friends of St Michael's. Their commitment, energy and fund-raising enhance greatly what the school can offer its pupils. Among the very many examples are the breakfast club, after-school childcare and clubs such as gardening, which rely on parental volunteers. Fund-raising efforts in recent years have been immense and have led to the opening of an impressive new school hall and library.

Parents are complimentary about how well their children are helped to settle in to the Reception class and the progress they make. You have made successful appointments of key staff in this area to make sure that children get off to a good start to school life at St Michael's. There are clear routines in place and children's behaviour is good. Children get along with each other well, demonstrating strong personal, social and emotional development. Children enter the school with skills and knowledge that are broadly typical for their age and make good progress from their starting points. A greater proportion of children than found nationally achieve a good level of development, showing they are ready for Year 1.

You have worked hard to ensure that assessments are robust and accurate. Regular observations by the Reception class teacher highlight the key achievements of children in each area of learning. However, the next steps in learning are not always clear. We agreed that the proportion of most-able children exceeding the early learning goals is not high enough. Reception children are given some very interesting and engaging activities and challenges, such as exploring the properties of ice and experimenting with magnets. While these activities are enjoyable, they do not always stretch the most able to use specific technical vocabulary or develop their investigative skills.

Phonics is taught very effectively, using a new more structured approach that you have introduced. Children in Reception become confident early readers and the proportion of pupils meeting the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check has improved.

You have developed a curriculum that is broad, balanced and makes good use of the school's setting. There are many interesting and enjoyable opportunities for pupils. Pupils I spoke to enjoyed the recent informative trip to a local vineyard and are looking forward with excited anticipation to the visit to the Natural History Museum in London. Opportunities to develop responsibility as monitors demonstrate good social development. Pupils' spiritual development is very strong, supporting the clear Christian ethos of the school. British values such as democracy are taught in an age-appropriate and meaningful way, for example by electing school councillors in Year 1 and Year 2. Pupils are certainly well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Although there are many interesting activities and topics, skills and knowledge in subjects other than English and mathematics are not developed to a deep enough level. While they learn many interesting facts, pupils do not have well-developed historical, geographical, artistic and scientific skills. Opportunities for pupils to write about their knowledge and skills in other subjects are also limited.

In such a small school, so much of the leadership responsibility falls to you personally. Although you have sought to develop the skills of other teachers to take on wider responsibility, this has often been thwarted by frequent staff changes. You have been proactive in seeking to work with other schools in the Dorking Partnership to share training and moderate the quality of pupils' learning. You have also benefited from a link with a local school, which was organised by the local authority, to help you successfully develop the teaching of mathematics.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

Parents and children are universally confident that St Michael's School is a safe place. However, this does not make you, or your team, complacent or any less vigilant. The fact that you know and nurture your pupils so well makes it possible for you to notice any unexplained changes in behaviour and follow them up.

As designated lead for safeguarding, you have ensured that all staff are trained in line with statutory requirements to ensure that they fulfil their duties to keep pupils safe from harm. You work well with other agencies when this is necessary.

Your deputy safeguarding lead is a long-standing member of staff who knows the pupils and their families well. With your support, she ensures that all necessary checks on staff are carried out before they are appointed. Furthermore she ensures that the school's many volunteers are appropriately checked and given clear guidance about their safeguarding responsibilities.

Governors check and audit the school's procedures regularly, and check that any minor action points are followed up quickly. They keep themselves updated with the latest training including around extremism and radicalisation.

Governors made appropriate improvements to the school site and security in recent years to ensure that it is as safe as possible.

You check that pupils attend school regularly and follow up any absence. As a result, overall attendance has improved in the last year. A few pupils are still absent too often. We agreed that further work with their families and other professionals may be necessary to remedy this.

### **Inspection findings**

- The proportion of pupils meeting the new challenging expected standard in reading and writing at the end of Year 2 in 2016 was above the national average. The proportion meeting the expected standard in mathematics was close to the national average. However, boys and girls had made at least expected progress from their starting points.
- The proportion of pupils exceeding the new national standard and who were able to demonstrate that they were working at a greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics was above that found nationally.
- Recent improvements in the teaching of mathematics were evident in lessons we observed and in pupils' workbooks. Together we saw evidence of higher expectations, the use of practical resources and pictorial representations, and more opportunities for solving word problems. For example, we observed Year 2 pupils confidently solving division problems.
- However, we also saw occasions where the work for the most able lacked challenge because they had to repeat the same type of questions too many times or were given tasks that they had successfully completed in the past. We agreed that pupils, and especially the most able, are not challenged to develop their mathematical reasoning skills.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well. They make good progress from their starting points and are well supported by other adults. Leadership of this area of the school's work is good.
- There are very few disadvantaged pupils attending the school. While the pupil premium funding is used well to provide tailored support, the intervention time is not used to also build on weaknesses identified in class learning.
- Teaching, that we observed together, engaged the pupils and ensured that they have good attitudes to learning. Pupils clearly enjoyed what they were learning and their behaviour in lessons was good. However, there were missed opportunities to develop skills beyond English and mathematics. For example we observed Year 1 pupils who had very thoughtfully chosen an appropriate gift they would make for the baby Jesus. They then set about making these gifts from a range of materials without using the opportunity to apply their

technology skills of designing, making and evaluating the product.

- There is a strong reading culture in the school and good links between home and school to promote reading. Work in English lessons is often based on good-quality texts.
- Attainment in reading at the end of Reception and the end of Year 2 is above national averages. Phonics screening check outcomes in Year 1 have improved because the new structured approach is taught well.
- Pupils enjoy what they read. The most able pupils read with enjoyment, expression and delight. They understand the author's use of humour and ask questions to further their understanding.
- Less confident pupils have a positive attitude to reading and are willing to have a go. They receive good support with daily intervention to help them catch up.
- We agreed it would be helpful to track progress from starting points to ensure that all pupils make strong progress to strengthen the high attainment in reading even further.
- You have ensured that there is a clear focus on spelling, punctuation and grammar in writing, which helps pupils to make good progress. Handwriting and presentation are generally of a good quality.
- When visiting classrooms, we saw pupils who are confident in their ability to identify key features of different types of texts, such as instructions.
- Writing in other subject areas is often of a poorer quality. The most able writers are restricted by having to use forms and writing frames which do not allow them to demonstrate their clear capability. This can slow their progress.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they further improve teaching to challenge the most able pupils by expecting more children to exceed the early learning goals in Reception and checking that assessment information is used well to plan the next steps in learning
- pupils more fully develop and apply reasoning skills in mathematics
- the curriculum is further developed to deepen and extend pupils' knowledge and skills in subjects other than English and mathematics
- suitable opportunities are found to develop more staff to share the leadership of the school so that it can continue to succeed and improve.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Guildford, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Surrey. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lee Selby  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

During the inspection I met with you, a group of governors (including the chair of the governing body) and the leader with responsibility for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. I looked at documentation relating to recruitment checks on staff, and talked to staff and pupils about safeguarding. Together we visited each class twice to observe learning. We looked at a sample of books from each class together, including some belonging to the disadvantaged and most able pupils, to see pupils' learning and progress in a range of subjects. I carefully considered the analysis of attendance information you presented. I heard some pupils from Year 2 read, including some who were most able. I spoke to a number of parents at the start of the school day and considered 38 responses to Parent View. I held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. Finally, I considered six responses to the confidential staff survey.

Throughout the inspection, my main areas of focus were how leaders had ensured good-quality mathematics teaching during a period of change, achievement in reading, how writing skills were applied in other subject areas and the school's work to promote good attendance and keep pupils safe from harm.